



# The Benefits of a Beard

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, February 11, 2008

## City Hall Diary

As some of you many know via Sal Pizarro of the Mercury News I have grown a beard. I stopped shaving the morning of the Mayor's State of the City speech. I joked with Sal that I was not going to shave until we fixed the structural budget deficit. Getting our City's finances in order is the number one priority and will take hard work and more community outreach. By that time, my beard will end up competing with Moses or the members of the band ZZ Top.

So for now the beard remains, providing shock value to those who see me with it for the first time. It is also a great disguise, as I am now able to go to the grocery store without being asked to fix a pothole or other like matter.

It came in quite handy on Fat Tuesday. Our Tuesday evening council meeting was cancelled, so I chose to spend my time as I have done many nights on the streets of downtown with our SJPd and Mounted Unit. Mardi Gras has been a small curse for our downtown in past years with many people outside of San Jose looking and hoping for something out of a "Girls Gone Wild" video. Quite the opposite occurred on Fat Tuesday. The mostly young male crowd that traveled from other cities simply just roamed around the downtown.

My beard, along with my black beanie and trench coat, provided me the appearance of Al Pacino in the movie "Serpico." This look allowed me to blend in instead of drawing attention by wearing a suit or dressed as a spokesperson for Banana Republic. Walking on the street with the crowd provides me a street level perspective that cannot be experienced in a police car.

This out-of-town crowd for the most part was not spending any money in the bars or restaurants. Early on, there were plenty of minors roaming, some even with beer in a bag. Later the crowds grew larger and older, but still they were not patronizing our downtown establishments, and, instead, just loitered.

Luckily, most of the convention visitors were in bed before the large crowd came. Mardi Gras and Cinco de Mayo have to be the worst PR nights for our downtown. To our SJPd's credit and hard work, the crowds are lessening each year. I saw firsthand the effectiveness of the police on horses riding through the crowd, patrolling on bikes, riding motorcycles etc., but this comes at a cost to the taxpayer of police overtime.

Our downtown continues to evolve for the positive as we look forward to new residents in the residential towers and recently filled storefronts in restored historic buildings. There are currently three solid plays downtown at City Lights Theater, San Jose Repertory and San Jose Stage. I have seen each of them and recommend them. So come on downtown to see a play for Lent, as Fat Tuesday is over.

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